

# Participatory Design in Redesigning an Academic Library

## Capturing Users' Work through Structured Observations

University of Maryland, College Park

### I. Purpose

This poster session focuses on one of the three sets of participatory design activities undertaken in the fall 2011 by a library-led project team to build an informational basis for a total redesign of McKeldin Library, the central library serving the University of Maryland, College Park. Graduate classes in anthropology and architecture also provided part of the information basis, all of which are now with an Architecture Studio to provide actual designs for a reprogrammed library.

This poster session will present the data, findings and findings' significance for the structured observation activity, to get a picture of how McKeldin Library is being used now.



### II. Methodology

#### Research Questions

1. Why do students come to the library?
2. What kind of activities do the students perform?
3. What time is most likely do the students come to the library to perform these activities?

#### Study Limitations

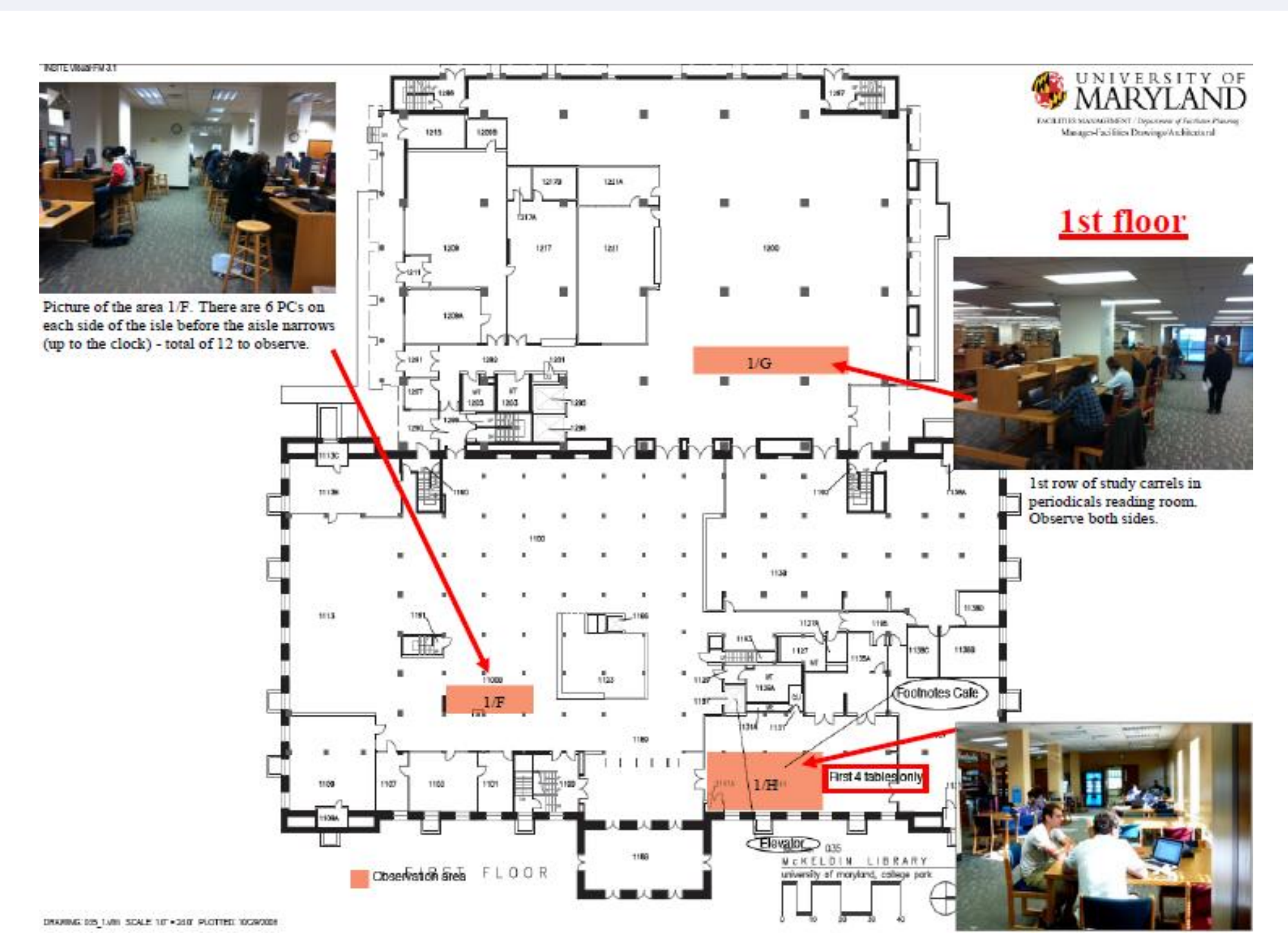
1. Observations were conducted during only one week of one semester.
2. Observations were conducted only in eight public spaces and these spaces are not fully representative of the entire building (library offices and restricted work areas were not observed).
3. Observers found a degree of variation among themselves in how they used the observation codes.
4. The study was mainly focused on students only as it was not possible to differentiate students from faculty members through observation.

#### Authors

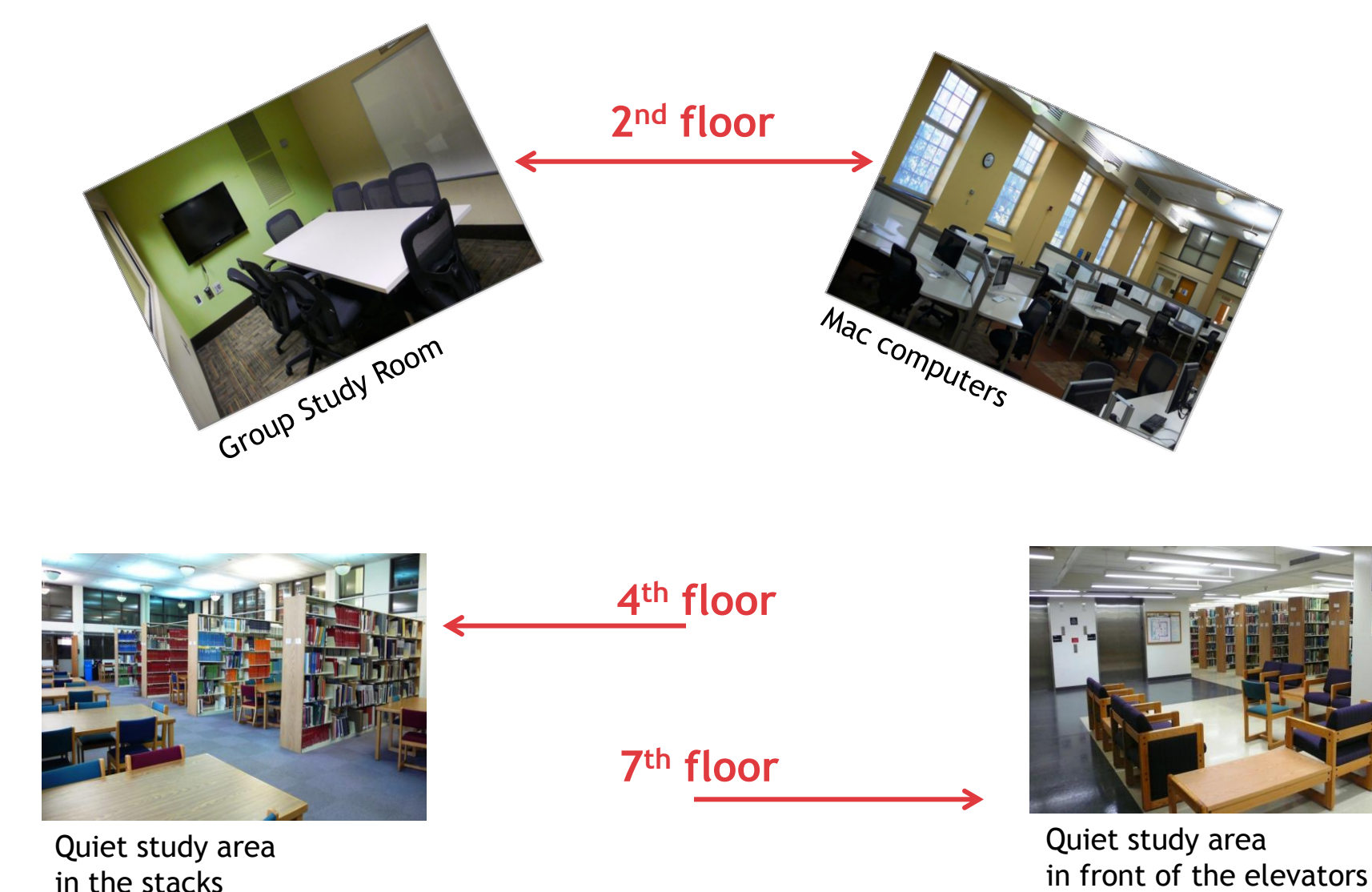
Poster session prepared by:  
**Nedelina Tchangelova & Lutgarda Barnachea**,  
with assistance from **M. Jane Williams**.  
Contact us at [lib-arlassess@umd.edu](mailto:lib-arlassess@umd.edu)

#### Observation Areas

1. The observation team identified seven public spaces in the library that were manageable in size, diverse in function, and close to entrances or in proximity to elevators and stairs.
2. Library offices or restricted areas were not observed.



Similar maps were designed to help the Observation Team members and their co-researchers to easily find the areas for observation on other floors:



#### Codes for the Activities Being Observed

A = Reading and/or working on an academic assignment  
L = Using own productivity device as part of academic work  
C = Using library computer as part of academic work  
B = Taking a break alone  
S = Socializing with others  
X = Not engaged  
(circle A's) = Doing academic work as a group

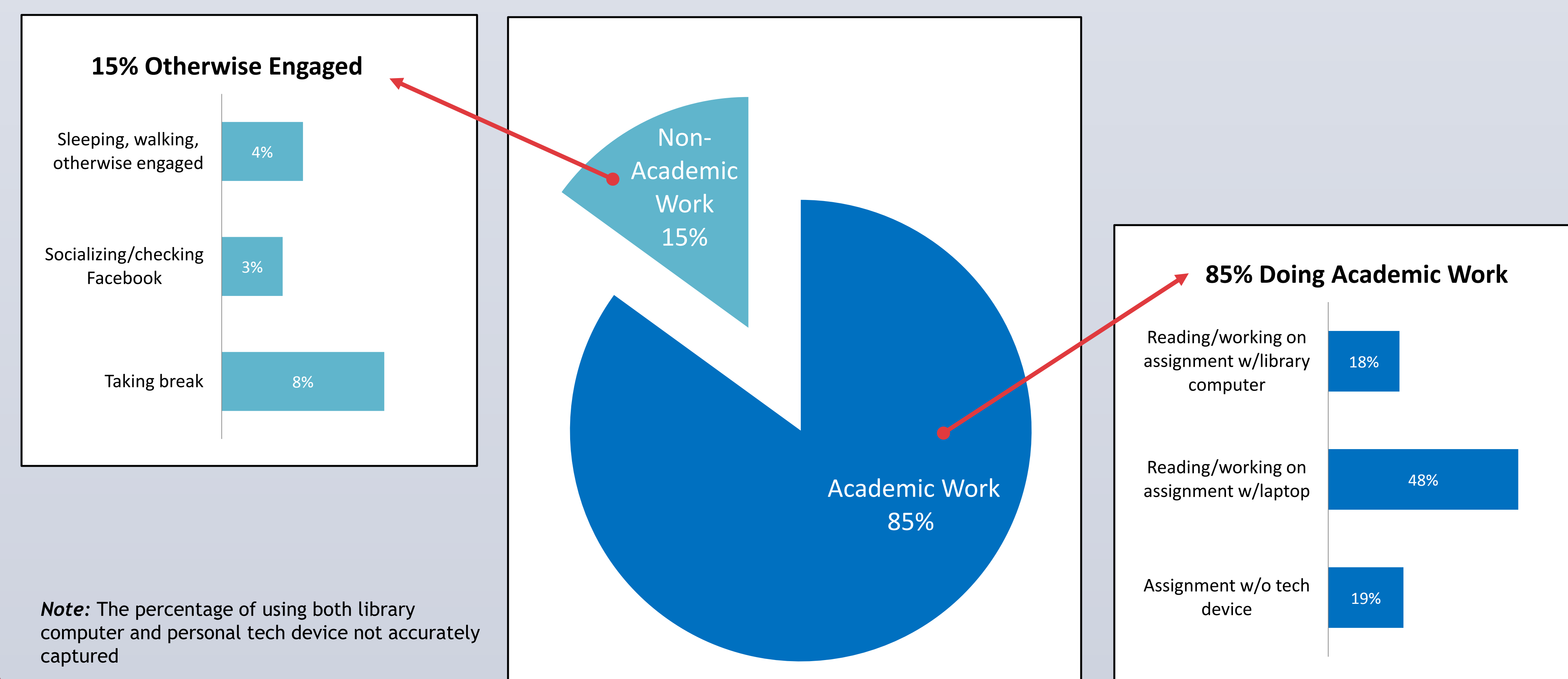
#### Time for observations

- 10 am, 2 pm and 10 pm
- Monday-Sunday (1 week)
- Fall 2011



### III. Results and Findings

#### Academic vs. Non-Academic Work

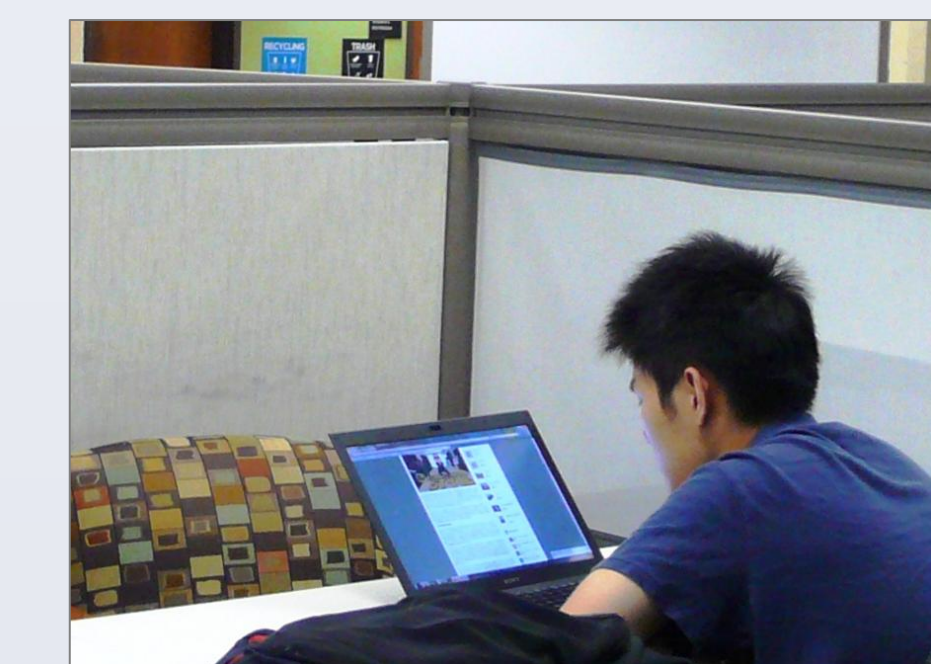


**The Feel of the Library** during observations was extremely varied:

- **Noise** → from quiet to noisy environments
- **Activities** → ranging from sleeping to an almost disruptive style of group work
- **Age** → seemed to be young people working individually.

#### Our Users

- Few if any grads/faculty appear to use public space
- More than 2/3 of the library users were working alone with the remainder taking advantage of large tables and small rooms to work in groups.



#### Use of Print Materials and Tech Devices

- Students generally not very engaged with library print materials - mostly engaged with personal materials, and tech devices.
- 1:5 observed people was using only print materials of some kind (mainly their own textbooks books and papers) and no electronic devices.
- The majority of users were using a library-supplied computer, their own laptop or other device.



#### Individual vs. Group Study

- Students observed taking advantage of both group and individual spaces
  - More than 2/3 working alone
  - Group work increases throughout afternoon, evening

### IV. Look toward the Future



- Students will need different spaces with different level of noise and functions.
- Students will need the library for the sense of community - to study together but not necessarily as a group.